

GALATIANS PART 1

GAL. 1.1-9

We spent much of the last two years studying through the book of Acts, reminding ourselves of the history of the founding of the early church and reviewing the message of the Gospel as it spread from Jerusalem, throughout Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

The church grew very rapidly in those first days after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But as the church grew, so did the persecution of the church by the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea.

As the persecution worsened, those who proclaimed Christ were forced to flee. As they did, they carried the message of the good news of Jesus Christ with them back to their homes and into the homes of strangers in far off regions of the world – and many of those were the homes of non-Jewish peoples.

Among those who were committed to fulfilling the Great Commission were Paul and Barnabas. They were called by God to be missionaries to the ends of the earth, and were commissioned as missionaries by the church at Antioch of Syria.

Eventually these two parted company and began to work in different areas of the region. Paul was intent on reaching out to places that had never heard the Gospel message – to plant new churches in new places in spite of the risk.

He was also aware that there was a special calling on his life to be the apostle of Christ responsible for carrying the gospel message to that part of the world which was not Jewish.

As the Gospel message spread across the world, doctrinal question inevitably arose.

As long as Christianity was about Jews witnessing to Jews, things seemed to go relatively smoothly, in spite of the threats from the Jewish leadership.

When people of other nations – most commonly referred to as “Gentiles” in the Scriptures – began to respond to the message of

the gospel and to profess Christ as Lord and be baptized, then a whole different set of problems arose.

- What would happen to the laws concerning ceremonial cleanliness if Jews began to live in constant association with non-Jews?
- What about the strict dietary laws and the traditions that had been handed down for generation after generation?
- Was the church supposed to open its doors to the entire world?
- Or is that narrow passageway into the kingdom of God that Jesus mentioned defined by the restrictive boundaries of Judaism?

These questions were being debated from Jerusalem to Ephesus and everywhere else that there was a Jewish contingent within the church. Galatia is not alone in dealing with these questions, but it does become a focal point for the conflict.

Galatia was a province in the empire of Rome, but its origins were not Asian – they were European.

Hundreds of years before Christ, a tribe of Celtic invaders referred to as Gauls conquered what today we know as France. The Romans identified this region of Europe by these savage warriors.

About three centuries before Christ, a part of these people known as Gauls swept through Italy and Greece and Macedonia on into Asia Minor – modern day Turkey – and even threatened the cities of Syria.

They were eventually defeated and forced to settle in northern Asia Minor in a place that came to be named after them – Galatia. Later, the Romans included the land south of this region as part of the province which Paul and his contemporaries referred to as Galatia.

From our study of the book of Acts – in chapters 13-14, we know that on their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Galatia and established churches in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe – cities of the southern part of the province of Galatia.

All along the way they faced persecution from the Jews who were opposed to the teaching that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. In Lystra, the Jews stoned Paul, then dragged him outside of the city and left him for dead.

But God had other plans for Paul.

He recovered from this stoning and continued to be faithful to his call as an apostle of Jesus Christ. His was a personal investment of time, and wealth, and even his very life blood to see that these churches in Galatia were establish and firmly grounded in the truth of the Gospel message.

Now, he is shocked and upset to hear that something has suddenly gone so very wrong in these churches.

The result is the book of Galatians.

What has happened to make Paul so upset?

A key verse to understanding...

- the problem in the churches of Galatia,
- why Paul is so angry, and
- the purpose behind Paul's writing this letter to the Galatians

Gal. 1:6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel...

Julius Caesar once described the Gauls – the direct relatives of the Galatians – as fickle, unstable, and quick to change their minds.

Whether it is fair to make such a universal statement about a race of people or not is a point of debate. This description by Julius Caesar may have been nothing more than a statement of prejudice by one soldier against his enemy.

Whether the assessment is true or not, one thing is certain – in a comparatively short time – short enough that Paul was literally astounded by it – the Galatians had abandoned the truth of the gospel as Paul had taught it and had begun to believe a false doctrine.

After Paul left Galatia to continue his mission to as much of the world as he could reach, the churches of Galatia seemed, at first, to do very well.

Then there came on the scene Jews who had made a profession of faith in Christ – who identified themselves as Christians – but who still considered themselves Jews.

They believed that, to be a true Christian, a person had to also keep the Law of Moses as well as observe the feast days and the traditions and rituals of OT Judaism.

Before a person could truly be accepted into the kingdom, they must become a Jew, including the physical act of circumcision.

They were not blatant in their false teaching. In fact, they did not deny that the atoning death and resurrection of Christ were essentials of salvation. The problem is that they taught this was not enough – that a person needed to do more to be completely saved.

In other words, they added something to the Gospel that Paul had never taught them, and by doing so, corrupted the purity and simplicity of the message.

That is one thing that has so angered and disappointed Paul.

It is not the last time that someone will add something to the gospel message, however.

The Catholic Church – added seven sacrament of grace – seven actions that a person must take to experience the full measure of God's grace.

- Baptism
- Eucharist (Communion)
- Reconciliation (Penance: Conversion, confession, celebration)
- Confirmation (When a person receives the Holy Spirit)
- Marriage
- Holy Orders (Ordination)
- Anointing (Last Rites)

Pentecostals –added a second blessing – the baptism of the Holy Spirit – that a person must experience to be fully saved.

They also believe that a person can and must experience salvation repeatedly since a person can lose their salvation because of sin. In other words, there is no such thing as eternal security.

The Church of Christ – a person must be baptized as part of the salvation experience. The act of baptism is what saves.

7th Day Adventists – The requirement of the Law that a person keep the Sabbath Day is still in effect; thus they have their worship on Saturdays.

Jehovah's Witnesses – Salvation begins with Christ, but must be maintained by good works.

They require members to read only the prescribed literature produced by the Watchtower organization and discourage personal reading of the Bible.

Mormons – Jesus' sacrificial death was not enough. The Bible was not enough. So God sent Joseph Smith who wrote another testament called the Book of Mormon to supplement the ones already given in the Bible.

They added requirements of the Law such as the only way your marriage can be fully consecrated by God is for you to be married in one of their temples.

They also teach that a person can be baptized on behalf of someone already deceased. So your works count for someone else's salvation.

Baptists (Evangelicals) – We teach that, for a person to be saved, they must...

- Make a decision to be saved
- Pray a prayer
- Invite Jesus to come into their heart
- Walk down the aisle of a church to make it public

...all of this before a person's salvation becomes effective.

We teach that a profession of faith is sufficient to declare oneself saved and sanctified. (**Read James 2.14-20**)

We have added that a person who wants to be a good Christian must attend worship, read their Bible, pray and fast regularly, go on mission trips, help the poor, and tithe. The problem with such thoughts is the word must.

We have re-defined Christianity as a "must do" kind of religion instead of a "will do" kind of relationship with the living Christ.

We have forgotten that all of these things are not requirements for salvation and sanctification, but the fruit of salvation.

James A. Fowler:

Whenever a Christian begins to think that the performance standards of what they "do" or "don't do" is the basis of or the quality of their Christian life or their "spirituality," then they have lapsed into "Galatian thinking."

"If only I didn't smoke, drink, swear, or fall into my besetting sin; If only I prayed more, read my Bible more, witnessed more, was more regular in church attendance, got along better with my spouse, or was a better parent..., then I would be a better Christian and would be more blessed by God."

No! That is "Galatian" thinking, that evaluates Christian life by achievement, merit, and reward, rather than by constant receptive trust in the grace-working of God in Christ.

Such "Galatianism" is so pervasive and prevalent in the churches today as the religious legalists have duped Christians with the didactic declarations of "how-to" Christianity in prescribed procedures, formulas, techniques and duties which allegedly determine the distinguishing marks of a true disciple.

Like Paul, we must reject such as a false-gospel, and clearly explain that the only distinguishing mark of a genuine Christian is the manifestation of the life and activity of Jesus Christ in his or her life by the dynamic of God's grace.

<http://christinyou.net/pages/galat.html>

This "must do" kind of thinking – this "Galatian" concept of Christianity is what has angered Paul to the extent that he immediately fires off a letter to the churches of Galatia in an attempt to correct what has gone so horribly wrong.

Teaching of false doctrine is not all that these Judaizers have done to diminish the good work that Paul had begun in Galatia. They also made several accusations against Paul in an attempt to prove that his teachings were at best incomplete and at worst untrue.

They attempted to discredit him as an apostle. According to these false teachers, Paul was not a true apostle as were the other twelve Apostles.

His ministry had not been sanctioned by the original Apostles nor had it been authorized by a recognized Christian body. He was an apostle simply because he had so designated himself.

The issue of the **vindication of his call** to be an apostle of Christ is the first thing Paul deals with in chapters 1 & 2 of the book of Galatians.

Since Paul was not a true apostle, his teachings were therefore false. Paul taught things differently than James and the other Apostles were teaching concerning salvation back in Judea.

They claimed that James and Peter and the other apostles taught that since God's law is eternal, it cannot be set aside for anything else. Why, even Jesus kept all of the Law. Could those who claimed to be His followers do anything less?

Grace was necessary for salvation, but it simply was not enough.

This issue Paul deals with in chapters 3 & 4 by an **explanation of justification by grace**.

Thirdly, these Judaizers claimed that Paul's gospel message led to low morality. In other words, without the Law, there would certainly be an increase in lawlessness, sin, and immorality.

In chapters 5 & 6, Paul will make an **exhortation to sanctification** to counter this false understanding of God's grace.

What the Judaizers failed to realize is that "Christianity does not lead the believer away from the Law into nothingness (or into lawlessness). It leads him to Christ."

The Law binds. Grace sets us free.

Salvation by grace brings the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell in the believer, making him a new creation capable of obedience to God.

The change is first internal, then it is external.

The Holy Spirit produces fruit within the Christian that proves the working of grace in his heart and exhibits that work in actions of obedience and love toward God as well as acts of kindness and benevolence towards others.

The work of grace in the human heart produces a life free from the restrictions of the Law – free from dependence on observing forms and traditions.

Because of grace and the gift of faith, the Christian is now free to give all of his attention to fulfilling the will of God. (Brice)

Merrill C. Tenney: "...liberty consists not in the ability to disobey God with impunity, but in the ability to obey Him spontaneously without effective hindrance..."

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul defends the truth of the Gospel from perversion and compromise. (Arnold)

For that reason, it has often been referred to as the...

- Magna Carta of Christian Liberty
- Bill of Rights of the Christian Life
- Emancipation Declaration

...because grace has broken the bondage of both sin and legalism and set the Christian free to enjoy obedience and spiritual growth in Christ.

Heb. 10:1 The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. (NLT)

Heb. 7:19 For the law never made anything perfect. But now we have confidence in a better hope, through which we draw near to God. (NLT)

And that hope rests in the salvation that comes from Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone – and all of these are gifts of the God who loves.